

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY AND COLONIAL FIRST STATE GLOBAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

BY MAXIM GORKY
IN A NEW VERSION BY ANDREW UPTON

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION



ONE CUE

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Compiled by Hannah Brown.
The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on hbrown@sydneytheatre.com.au

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT *ON CUE*

In 2014, STC Ed is developing a new suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA, DRAMATIC FORMS, STYLES, CONVENTIONS and TECHNIQUES, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

Such resources include:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- podcasts
- worksheets / posters
- games / quizzes / surveys

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, under the leadership of Artistic Director Andrew Upton, that ethos still rings true. STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches

beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

www.sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

FOR *CHILDREN OF THE SUN* AND THE EDUCATION RESOURCES

SUITABLE FOR

Students in Years 11 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama

DRAMA STAGE 6 (HSC PRELIMINARY)

Outcome P2.2

Understands the contributions to a production of the playwright, director, dramaturg, designers, front-of-house staff, technical staff and producers.

Outcome P2.3

Demonstrates directorial and acting skills to communicate meaning through dramatic action.

Outcome P2.6

Appreciates the variety of styles, structures and techniques that can be used in making and shaping a performance.

Outcome P3.2

Understands the variety of influences that have impacted upon drama and theatre performance styles, structures and techniques.

Outcome P3.3

Analyses and synthesizes research and experiences of drama and theatrical styles, traditions and movements.

Outcome P3.4

Appreciates the contribution that drama and theatre make to Australian and other societies by raising awareness and expressing ideas and issues of interest.

DRAMA STAGE 6 (HSC)

Outcome H2.1

Demonstrates effective performance skills.

Outcome H2.2

Uses dramatic and theatrical elements effectively to engage an audience.

Outcome H2.5

Appreciates the high level of energy and commitment necessary to develop and present a performance.

Outcome H3.1

Critically applies understanding of the cultural, historical and political context that have influenced specific drama and theatre practitioners, styles and movements.

Outcome H3.3

Demonstrates understanding of the actor-audience relationship in various dramatic and theatrical styles and movements.

Outcome H3.5

Appreciates and values drama and theatre as significant cultural expressions of issues and concerns in Australian and other societies.

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY AND COLONIAL FIRST STATE GLOBAL ASSET MANAGEMENT PRESENT

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

BY MAXIM GORKY

IN A NEW VERSION BY ANDREW UPTON

NANNY
VALERIE BADER

MISHA
JAMES BELL

YELENA
JUSTINE CLARKE

YEGOR
YURE COVICH

NAZAR
JAY LAGA'AIA

LIZA
JACQUELINE MCKENZIE

VAGEEN
HAMISH MICHAEL

AVDOTYA
JULIA OHANNESSIAN

BORIS
CHRIS RYAN

MELANIYA
HELEN THOMSON

FEEMA
CONTESSA TREFFONE

PROTASOV
TOBY TRUSLOVE

DIRECTOR
KIP WILLIAMS

SET DESIGNER
DAVID FLEISCHER

COSTUME DESIGNER
RENEE MULDER

LIGHTING DESIGNER
DAMIEN COOPER

COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER
MAX LYANDVERT

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
ELSIE EDGERTON-TILL

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

PRODUCTION MANAGER
DAVE WILKINSON

STAGE MANAGER
MINKA STEVENS

DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER
SUZANNE LARGE

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER
ROXZAN BOWES

WIG, MAKE-UP & WARDROBE
SUPERVISOR
LAUREN A. PROIETTI

DRESSER/MAINTENANCE
LAUREN KENYON
ROSALIE LESTER

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER
GRANT SPARKES-
CARROLL

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER
BRETT BOARDMAN

2 HOURS 30 MINUTES,
INCLUDING INTERVAL

ANDREW UPTON'S VERSION OF
CHILDREN OF THE SUN WAS
FIRST PERFORMED BY THE ROYAL
NATIONAL THEATRE, LONDON, IN THE
LYTTLETON THEATRE ON 9 APRIL
2013.

2H 30MIN, INCLUDING INTERVAL. THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT THE DRAMA THEATRE, SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2014.

PRODUCTION PATRONS

STEPHEN AND
JULIE FITZGERALD

PRESENTING SPONSOR

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THEATRE
CO

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

BECOMING GORKY: STORY TELLER, PLAYWRIGHT, ACTIVIST BY CYNTHIA MARSH

Maxim Gorky is best known outside Russia as a political activist, writer and contemporary of Stalin. His relationship with Stalin was at best prickly, and there are lingering thoughts that Stalin may have engineered his death from poisoning in 1936 when Gorky became too difficult to handle. Gorky's long writing career began in the late 1880s when he acquired a singular reputation as the voice of the 'people'. The verbal arts of literature and theatre had been dominated by the gentry and the intelligentsia in the 19th century. By contrast, Gorky was of humble origins and self-educated. He had wandered as a near vagrant over vast swathes of southern Russia. In the Volga region, he had been on the fringes of radical student groups and began to publish stories related to his experiences and his politics, eventually obtaining work as a jobbing journalist. Maxim Gorky was not his real name. As Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, he was born in Nizhnii Novgorod in 1868 into a family which survived on a small cloth-dyeing business. The loss of his father at an early age, then his mother and the departure of his stepfather threw the young Peshkov onto the hands of his grandparents. His formidable grandfather quickly sent him out to work to earn a living, to the dismay of his equally formidable but gentle and spiritual grandmother. The boy worked as a skivvy in a shoe shop, as an apprentice draughtsman, in an icon painter's, a baker's and as a messenger boy in his varied career. As a teenager, after

attempting suicide on the death of his grandmother, he decided to leave his home town and worked his passage on steamers on the River Volga, the main artery of communication in this part of Russia. On publishing his first story in 1888, he chose the pseudonym of Maxim Gorky.

The change of name was the first step in his creation of a public persona for his mission as a writer and activist. The Russian word 'gor'kii' can be translated as 'bitter' in English, but this does not catch the full meaning of the Russian, more akin to our word 'grief'. There is little doubt that Gorky grieved for the underprivileged and the deprived in Russia and that this empathy drove his engagement in radical politics. So his 'bitterness' has an underlying sense of fellow-feeling, and not the implied destructive introspection of the English word. Gorky wrote his autobiography when already famous just before the First World War. Its three volumes record his life up to the point where he became independent as a writer in the late 1890s. It is a rich read but was also doubtless designed to cement the reputation Gorky himself had chosen as a 'grieving' voice from the 'people', seeking justice for the underprivileged.

His early stories, accessible, with clear morals and in style very like fables, were wildly popular. They contrasted directly with the fashionable inclination toward the mystical, the obscure, and the decadent, which was coming into Russian literature via the influence of French symbolism. The stories countered the didacticism of Leo Tolstoy and the cloying realism of other popular writers, such as Vladimir

Korolenko. Anton Chekhov was the unassailable master of the 'impressionistic' shortest of short stories, where detail spoke louder than descriptions. Chekhov had also made his mark as a comic writer, an entertainer. Gorky chose allegory, the folk tale and a serious overtone.

By contrast to his contemporaries, Gorky's stories were in the colloquial Russian of the ordinary reader and of those who could not read. His first novel, *Foma Gordeev* (1899), though, was regarded as biased in its negative depictions of the tradespeople of his native town and overblown in its fulsome language.

In 1898, Gorky was sent south to recuperate from TB and after having been arrested for being involved in suspect discussion groups. He ended up in the Crimea, by this time the home of Chekhov and intermittently of Tolstoy. Tolstoy tried to advise the young man on his writing, his politics and his beliefs. Chekhov put him in touch with the newly formed Moscow Art Theatre (MAT).

The Art Theatre had opened in 1898 as a joint venture between Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. It was set up as share-holding company, and had to pay its way and make a profit. In his business manager role, Nemirovich-Danchenko realised the young celebrity writer would be a significant commercial catch for the theatre. Gorky's first play, *Philistines* (1902, literally, 'Tradespeople'), was not the success its author or the theatre expected, but *The Lower Depths*, some eight months later,

About the playwright (cont.)

was. Gorky gave a voice to those seeking a living on the streets by day, who shelter by night in a doss-house. The language is rich and colourful, culled from his own experiences on the road and in similar shelters as a young man. Not a little of the success of *The Lower Depths* was due to Stanislavsky's and his designer Viktor Simov's work on the production. Some spectators thought they would catch fleas from the beggars, streetwalkers and the like, embodied by the performers. The original title 'Without the Sun' (Bez solntsa) was first changed to 'At the Bottom of Life', and then 'At the Bottom' (a literal translation of the Russian Na dne). In *Children of the Sun* (1905), Gorky was in some ways writing the companion piece to *The Lower Depths*. He wished to deal with the people at another point on the social scale, not the well-born or the wealthy, whom he thought to be incorrigible, but the rising professional class who should be dedicating their talents to the improvement of life for the masses.

Gorky and Chekhov were both writing for MAT at the same time. They were in conversation and correspondence during 1900 while Chekhov was writing *Three Sisters* and Gorky was working on his first two plays. As a result, their plays engaged in a dialogue on the stage of MAT. Chekhov took some of Gorky's ideas to task in *Three Sisters* (1901). He then responded to the answers Gorky gave in *The Lower Depths* (late 1901), in his own final play *The Cherry Orchard* of 1904. Gorky's *Summerfolk*, later in 1904, begins where Chekhov finishes. Lopakhin's plan outlined in *The Cherry Orchard* has been realised: to build summer cottages for the wealthy as retreats from their city lives. These are the professional classes, educated, self-sufficient and, too frequently, self-satisfied.

In this period, Gorky's connections to radical politics grew closer, especially to Bolshevism. In sympathy with a mass

demonstration in January 1905 in Petersburg, Gorky was appalled when the marchers were shot at by government troops, and many died or were trampled to death in the panic. Under surveillance since his arrest in the 1890s, Gorky was arrested for having compiled, with others, a public document accusing the Tsar of the massacre. He was held for a month in the Peter and Paul fortress in St Petersburg. It was here he wrote *Children of the Sun*. He had toyed with the idea for more than a year. The lack of leadership to the demonstration intensified Gorky's profound disillusionment with the intelligentsia. Nevertheless, his earlier fascination with their idealism was not completely submerged and still flickers in the play.

MAT had declined *Summerfolk* in 1904, but took on the risk of staging *Children of the Sun* in October 1905. It was beaten to the première, though, by Komissarzhevskaya's Petersburg company, which opened their production twelve days earlier. At the MAT première, the audience panicked when they mistook the arrival of the protesting workers at the end of the play for a real demonstration entering the theatre from the streets. There were calls for the production to be closed down, but it was given 21 times that autumn. On his release from prison, Gorky was sent under surveillance to Riga, at that time in the Russian empire. After being involved in further disturbances in Moscow in late autumn, early in 1906 he went into exile, ostensibly to raise money for the Bolshevik cause. Leaving Russia in great secrecy, he travelled across Europe to France, then took a boat from Cherbourg to New York. After nearly a year of controversy (he was travelling with his mistress, Mariia Andreeva, an actress with the MAT company), he settled on Capri in Italy, only returning to Russia under an amnesty for political exiles just before the First World War. He remained in Russia until 1921, when he went back to Italy ostensibly for his health, but most probably due to his deteriorating relationship

with Lenin. After several highly successful visits in the late 1920s and early 30s, when he was feted as the father of Russian literature, Stalin cajoled him into returning permanently in 1932. One of his final acts was to rewrite a play from 1910, Vassa Zheleznova, to better fit the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, the cultural politics he devised at Stalin's insistence.

Was Gorky, like Protasov in *Children of the Sun* all those years before, now just as blinded, this time by the new all-embracing sun that was Stalin? There is evidence that privately he fought against Stalin's harsh controls, but publicly he gave him his allegiance. Gorky died in 1936 in Moscow, possibly poisoned. The house awarded him by Stalin, a stunning art nouveau mansion built at the beginning of the century, still stands as his museum and as an and as an enigmatic monument to his memory.

Cynthia Marsh is Emeritus Professor of Russian Drama and Literature at the University of Nottingham.

Sydney Theatre Company (2014). *Children of the Sun*, Program. Drama Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company.

FROM THE DIRECTOR KIP WILLIAMS



One of the major tensions in this production is that between the historical context of Gorky's original play and the vividly contemporary language of Andrew's adaptation.

It's a fruitful tension, in that it keeps our relationship to the past very much in dialogue with our present, and, indeed, it echoes Gorky's original mission to have his play about 1860s provincial Russia speak to the concerns of his present day revolutionary context.

This act of using history as a framework through which to talk about the present offers up many insights into the then and now, both socially and politically. The class divide and battle for enlightenment we witness in the play are, on the one hand, very particular to the 19th century and, yet, they feel deeply familiar to today. So too do the interpersonal crises of each character. Ultimately, this results in the telling of a story that transcends the limits of both time and place. A universality emerges.

It is this act of storytelling that David, Renée, Damien, Max and I have sought to bring into the fore in the development of a theatrical language for this work. Our evocation of history is realised through a simple exposed theatricality, where your imagination is called upon to complete the transportation back in time.

In the same way that Andrew's language has one foot firmly placed in the present and one in the past, so too does the visual language of the production.

This play is tied to a fascinating historical context, but in all its incarnations, from Gorky to Upton, it has been and always will be first and foremost a story that talks very directly to the concerns of the present.

Sydney Theatre Company (2014). *Children of the Sun*, Program. Drama Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company.

GRAPPLING WITH GORKY

BY ANDREW UPTON

What is it about the Russian writers I wonder?

Extremity, complexity, brutality, optimism. But not blind optimism, an optimism despite the obvious impossibility of salvation.

There is such a flowering of great literature in the hundred years around the revolution. Such a need to tell the story, be it in novel, play or short form. This need to tell, to examine and investigate the dynamics of their society fills Russian writing with purpose and vitality. They are literally making it up as they go along. The spirit of theatre, it seems, makes it particularly amenable to this energy: improvising, knocking together, throwing it on - because the spirit of theatre is all about the present. Theatre, like life, happens now and is gone. Because of this essential immediacy, theatre at its best is a forum. It is a place to table observations, criticisms and ambitions for one's society. To enact the good, the bad and the probable. Before they happen sometimes, or after they have happened more often than not. This theatrical heritage, theatre's critical role in the formation and elaboration of society, is lucidly manifested in the work of Gorky before the revolution.

Children of the Sun is a remarkable document, on so many levels. It captures the urge and the pressure for change before that urge has been colonized by ideology. Before it has been politicized and made accurate or dangerous (depending on your persuasion) by Marxism and historical

materialism. This inchoate quality of the pre-revolutionary energy is harnessed by Gorky to drive the chaos and disorder of the plot. To illuminate the ignorance and bigotry of the characters.

To reveal the crack in the world that will, in time, settle for the glue of ideology.

Whenever an adaptation is undertaken, a specific production is begun. It is important to find the angle on the story that resonates with the day and age. The time and the place in which the show will be seen. It is not for an adaptation to seek to replace the original or improve on it, it is to bring it alive for now. There are myriad ways to translate a line of dialogue and there are exponentially more ways to adapt a scene. Some writers are very scrupulous and particular about their structure and their rhythms. Others are fired by a need to tell the story and there is a massive outpouring of scenarios. Gorky is very much the latter type of writer, he just opens the nozzle on his ideas, his themes and his situations and lets it all come streaming out. His theatre is raw and immediate and was very, very topical at the time. There are bumps and dips that (in some instances) are best smoothed over.

The choices we make for our production are going to be very different from the choices made next time *Children of the Sun* is programmed. There is a sense that these can be new(ish) plays, perpetually reinvented and reinvigorated for a new audience and a new time. Their historical setting can become another, a new tool in their resonating arsenal. History is a mirror that can fill us with a sense of continu-



Jacqueline McKenzie in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Brett Boardman. ©

Grappling with Gorky (cont.)

ity, an insight into our patterns as a species and a reminder of where things went wrong and how much they have changed... or not. History places us in relation to the work. We know the Russian turmoil did eventually find a revolutionary direction, take shape, get commandeered.

We know that the commandeering comrades kept a tight hold on their new power and we know that power is never easily relinquished. It is with our eye firmly on the present that this particular excursion to the past makes the most sense. With the benefit of hindsight we know the glue of ideology these folk will resort to (not necessarily voluntarily in all cases). We know the mess they will make trying to fix it up with all-encompassing historical solutions and ideological certainty.

In this way the lumpy nature of Gorky's narrative voice lends itself to new productions, enjoys a bit of anachronism and misrepresentation. The original still stands. There are many literary, historically devout translations to be found; Gorky's work in fact remains untouched.

The setting of the play is typically bourgeois, a group of over-indulged kidults, still living with their Nanny, circle around their destiny in seemingly futile conversational eddies until it comes and clobbers them. But these characters are remarkable creations: Protasov, the chemist whose prescience about the role of science in the future - especially his beloved chemistry - is spot on. His sister, Liza, whose anguish about the state of the world has set her right on edge,

but once again her prescience and insight are bewilderingly accurate. And Yelena: his wife who knows there is something wrong, who senses the need for action and who just may be the very embodiment of the revolutionary spirit. Their friends, acquaintances, would-be lovers and the burgeoning peasant class who are all desperate for some new world order, or just some personal identity aside from the cloying drudgery of history. All these folk, fully formed and lovingly detailed, crash and collide into each other. And none of them knows exactly how to hold the whole picture together, but all have at least one piece of the puzzle in their grasp. From this naive energy Gorky has wrought the great drama that the inchoate offers any writer of character. People are so much more interesting and volatile when they know they want something but don't know what it is.

This incredible volatility and desperate searching blows the typical setting apart and gives the play its most modern resonances.

The horror is behind us, on the horizon.

Sydney Theatre Company (2014). *Children of the Sun*, Program. Drama Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company.

ABOUT THE PLAY



FOR QUICK FACTS ON THE SHOW CHECK OUT OUR PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW FACT SHEET!



Jacqueline McKenzie, Justine Clark, Valerie Bader, Julia Ohannessian, Toby Truslove, Jay Laga'aia, Chris Ryan and Yure Covich in SIC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014.
Image: Brett Boardman. ©

BORN TO PRIVILEGE, BOUND FOR REVOLUTION.

Following on from his adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Andrew Upton's new adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *Children of the Sun* takes a fresh, colloquial look at the human condition.

In a rambling mansion in provincial Russia, a sister, a

brother, their partners and admirers pursue their intimate intrigues oblivious to bigger new realities brewing at their door. A family born to privilege but bound for dysfunction.

Protasov might be the man of the house, but, even when he lifts his eyes from his chemistry set, he is blind to his wife's infidelities, his friend's advances and his sister's quiet despair. In something of a casting coup, three of our most treasured actresses - Justine Clarke (*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*), Jacqueline McKenzie (*Sex with Strangers*) and Helen

Thomson (*Mrs Warren's Profession*) - form a formidable trio around our hero, as outside the propulsive energy of revolution reaches a crescendo.

Both a sparkling comedy and a thoughtful exploration of the larger issues of privilege, progress and being caught at the wrong end of history, *Children of the Sun* captures the atmosphere of upheaval of its era - with more than a fleeting resonance to our own troubled times.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Scientist, Pavel Protasov, is trying to conduct an experiment but finds that he is continually being interrupted. Nanny is bustling about, disrupting the experiment, announcing the arrival of cholera in the village, demanding that he speak to the blacksmith Yegor about beating his wife and telling Protasov off for neglecting his wife. Yegor comes in but Protasov is preoccupied with lining the storage tank as a precaution against chemical run-off from his experiments, and stops short of chastising him for wife-beating. The household is divided. Boris, a local vet, thinks Protasov should have hit Yegor; Protasov's sister, Liza, thinks they should set an example by not resorting to violence.

Melaniya, Boris' sister, arrives to return some books. She has a crush on Protasov, which he takes advantage of by asking her for ten fresh eggs every day. He needs them for his experiments. Protasov returns to his laboratory, and Melaniya is left with the maid Feema. She bribes the maid to report on Protasov's wife's relationship with the artist, Vageen. Nazar, the pawn-shop owner, is looking for Protasov. He is delivering the copper needed to line the storage tank, but wants payment for the rent first. Protasov is baffled. He doesn't deal with money, that's left up to his wife, or Nanny. Nazar agrees to trade for an area of woodland for his son Misha.

His son brings the supplies in and offers Feema 15 roubles a month and an apartment. She has had better offers: 100 roubles from the butcher.

Melaniya reveals that she and Boris grew up separately and didn't meet until they were adults. She is interested in Protasov's experiment, so he takes her into the lab. Boris is surprised that Protasov puts up with Melaniya. Liza says Boris needs someone to love, and he agrees: he has been waiting for her for two years. She is ill but that doesn't dissuade him. He tells her how his sister married a rich old man who treated her badly. She tried to commit suicide and Boris had to cut her down.

Protasov's wife, Yelena, enters with Vageen, prompting Boris to take his leave. Vageen is in love with Yelena and tries to persuade her to leave her husband. She doesn't want to be the one who breaks Protasov's heart, though. Feema tries to tell Yelena about the bribe offered by Melaniya but is told to get out. Protasov is also angry, his experiment has been contaminated.

ACT II

Misha again propositions Feema and tells her that the chemicals in the house can affect people. Boris tells him to leave. He and Liza are playing a game, and he takes the opportunity to propose to her (not for the first time). She refuses him, saying she is a cripple. Yelena, Vageen and Protasov are having a conversation about art, which is interrupted by the arrival of Yegor who is drunk.

Melaniya arrives with the eggs she promised Protasov. She begs Yelena to let her have him – she has the money to build him a laboratory. Protasov isn't going to perform his experiment today so Boris and the others start throwing the eggs about. Liza is upset at the waste of food; Protasov tries to comfort her, saying that his work will be for the benefit of all mankind, eventually. Liza reads a poem she has written, expressing how petty their obsessions are.

Avdotya bursts in, pursued by her husband Yegor. She is angry with Protasov, believing his experiments to be contaminating the area. Yakov also reappears, bleeding. Boris asks them all to leave. Liza is anxious. She wants peace now, not in hundreds of years.

Synopsis (cont.)

ACT III

Feema tells Yegor that she is leaving. She is going to marry a wealthy older man but still asks for a kiss from Yegor. Nanny wants Feema to fetch supplies from the village but the sickness outbreak means it could be dangerous. Yegor volunteers to go in her place but is needed to fix the gate. Boris advises against going to the village at all. Nazar arrives. The villagers believe that Protasov's experiments are making people sick. Nazar is worried because there is a fault in the copper he sold to Protasov and there could be a crack in the storage tank. Yelena tries to talk to Protasov but is interrupted by Feema, who announces her departure and demands three weeks' pay.

Boris is looking for Liza, he has her medicine. He is told by Yelena that he should ask Liza to marry him. Yelena and Protasov's approval of their relationship gives Boris confidence to ask her again. Yegor's wife is sick; he blames the fault in the storage tank. Yelena offers to go to her, despite the warnings of sickness and violence. Yegor refuses a doctor, believing doctors' experiments to be the problem. Yelena leaves; Boris tells Protasov to call a doctor, he is going to propose to Liza. Protasov tries to call a doctor but none is available. Melaniya tells him how vital his work is and offers to build him a laboratory. She tells him that Yelena doesn't love him, forcing him to leave. Feema notes that she and Melaniya are alike – all they think about is money. Liza turns Boris' proposal down again; if they had children, she would worry about passing her illness on to them. Upset, Boris becomes a subject of interest to Vageen, who wants to

draw him. Boris leaves. Vageen turns on Protasov, telling him that he loves Yelena. She returns from the village and is not interested in their discussion; Yegor's family is sick. She is concerned that the crack in the tank means that chemicals are leaking into the water supply. Liza starts to become hysterical, convinced that something bad is happening.

ACT IV

Liza has realised that she loves Boris and wants to marry him but no one has seen him. Yelena has decided to leave Protasov. He protests that he wouldn't be able to finish his work without her. Melaniya tells Yelena that she doesn't know why Protasov turned down her offer to build a laboratory. Yelena sends her out to talk to Liza.

Vageen arrives with a painting for Yelena. He believes that she has used him to win back her husband. Nanny comes in with a letter for him from Boris. The note suggests that he has committed suicide. Liza becomes hysterical. The villagers are rioting and have been attacking doctors. Yelena berates Protasov for focusing on science rather than the people around him. The riot has reached the house. Liza runs out and opens the gates. Yelena goes out brandishing a revolver. Protasov is left by himself, contemplating what is happening and in the final moments of the play is left alone and calling for Nanny.

This synopsis has been adapted with permission from: Blakely, J. (2013). *The National Theatre Learning Children of the Sun Background Pack*. United Kingdom: The National Theatre.



James Bell, in rehearsal for STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014.
Image: Grant Sparkes-Carroll.©

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

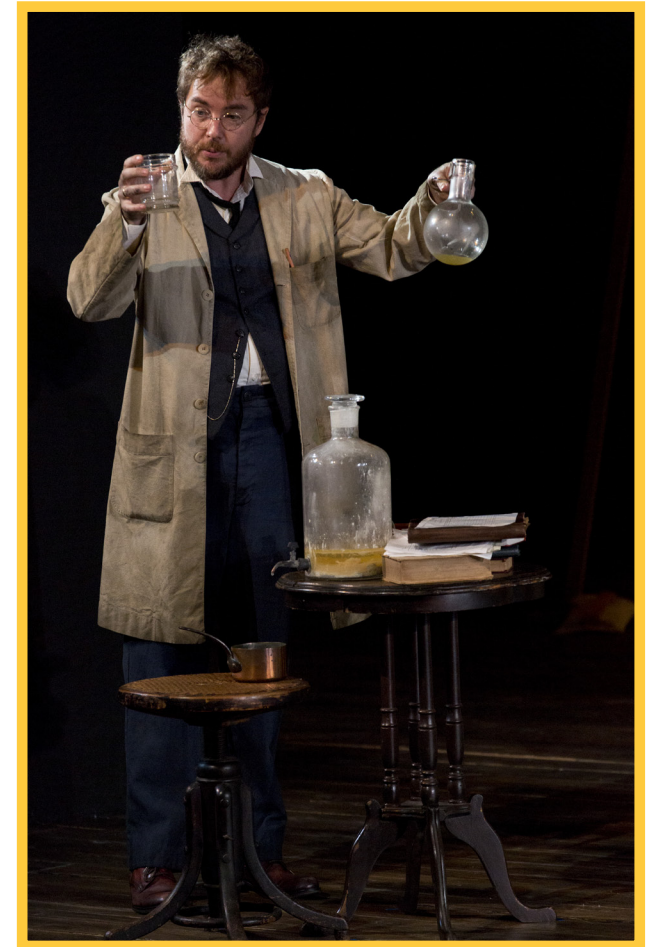
Children of the Sun is a play comprised of 12 characters, six of whom are described by Andrew Upton as 'wealthy aristo kidults' who are still doted upon by their nanny. The remaining six characters are servants and workers for the Protasov household. The distinction between their class consciousnesses divides them and in the end prepares them for revolutionary Russia as the gates to the Protasov estate are opened and the rioting masses flood in.

PAVEL PROTASOV

As the last in the line of the Protasov dynasty, Pavel is expected to take responsibility not only for the running of his own household but also for the local townspeople, devoted to his family name. However, he is preoccupied with his chemistry experiments and making the next great scientific leap. In the meantime, he is wilfully unaware of the exasperation of his alienated wife and the swelling discontent of the people outside the household walls.

Consumed by his experiments, Pavel demonstrates a total disregard for the duties of daily life such as rent and the welfare of others seen in the line "Oh god, would you stop nagging me? Rent? Land? Wife Beating? Maids? I.Don't. Give.A.Damn." (pg. 36) Pavel's sights are firmly set on how his work will advance the future of science. His ideas are well ahead of the time and he sights chemistry as the science of the 20th century, ahead of physics and biology. Despite being a forward thinker in matters of science he wishes that society around him would stay the same for his own convenience. In the final moments of the play he says "All I want to do is for it to be how it was. Nanny!" (pg. 117)

Pavel's pursuit of scientific discovery ultimately leads to destruction when poison leaks and makes the townspeople sick. His refusal to accept responsibility and fix the problem moves the Dramatic Action of the play forward and results in the chaos at the end of the play.



Toby Truslove in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Brett Boardman. ©

Character Analysis (cont.)

BORIS

As a veterinary doctor at a local practice, Boris is the only employed and educated member of the group. When he first moved to the area he loved spending time at the house, seduced by the stimulating conversation and the spirit of scientific enquiry. Inertia has made the atmosphere stale and Boris has become jaded. Now the only thing that keeps him coming back and repeating the same frustrating pattern of behaviour is his unrequited love for Liza.

NANNY

The longest-standing servant of the household staff, Nanny has looked after several generations and witnessed the gradual decline of the Protasov family. She is desperate to push Pavel into what she sees as his rightful role – the strict enforcer of a bygone feudal order. But she treats him more like an errant child than a master. Nanny, like Pavel, is keen for Russian life and society to remain unchanged.

MELANIYA

Boris' sister, Melaniya, is the latest addition to the motley bunch of people who frequent the Protasov household.

Her husband's recent death has liberated her from a 'loveless, childless, hate-filled marriage' which she had previously attempted to escape with an unsuccessful suicide attempt. She has fallen for Pavel, showing a keen interest in his work and is painfully determined that he will be her long-awaited ticket to happiness, no matter what the cost.

LIZA

Pavel's sister, Liza, is the only member of the household with the awareness to recognise the violent massing and rioting that threatens them. The lonely frustration of this knowledge often manifests itself in her emotionally wrought visions of a terrible future: "Hatred is all that grows and swells and swells in their throats." (pg. 10) Her hysteria leads the other characters to dismiss her political opinions as symptoms of her mental instability. While aware of the violence and danger of the future, Liza is simultaneously aware of the need for peace, "We have to find peace now. Now. Not in two hundred years." (pg. 60)

However she understands the need for the turbulence to reach a climax in order for peace to occur. This is seen in the final moments of the play when she opens the gates to the Protasov home, allowing the rioting masses to charge in.



Toby Truslove and Helen Thomson in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014.
Image: Brett Boardman. ©

Character Analysis (cont.)



Hamish Michael in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Brett Boardman. ©

YELENA

Since Pavel's scientific tinkering has become increasingly obsessive, Yelena has come closer and closer to giving up on the idea that she can have any kind of relationship with her husband. Her recent interest in painting and close friendship with the artist who is teaching her [Vageen] has provided the impetus to make a change.

Vageen sees his relationship with Yelena as a romantic one; however Yelena never professes her love for Vageen. Yelena wants to honour her marriage to Pavel and seeks to ascertain his feelings towards her: "Garbage? Oh, it's easy for you to stand in judgement. This is the man I married. This is what we have made together." (pg. 38)

Yelena is bound by a strong sense of duty while relishing freedom and seeing beauty in change. Like Liza, she is aware of the revolution about to occur in society and, like her husband, is inspired by the potential for future change. Her vision for the future is poetic but acknowledges that ordinary people will have more agency: "...I see...a ship on the wide ocean, the waves sucking at the prow, that's the eternal miasma desperate to drag the vessel under. But there, there – ranged along the deck stand these, great... great people. But standing simply proudly determined – not, not Napoleon's and Caesar's people. Simpler, Real people. And they are looking beyond the immediate squall and the danger, to the future - to some shared, understood, sought after, beyond." (pg. 45) However, at the end of the play she has lost faith in her husband's ability to achieve

greatness and resolves to leave him. She does this not for Vageen, but for herself.

She is drawn to art and consequently forms an easy connection with Vageen. Towards the end of the play, she courageously goes to help Yegor's sick family, risking infection from disease, and in the final moments leads the family into the frontier, rifle in hand, to face the riot outside the Protosov home.

VAGEEN

A university friend of Pavel's, Vageen is the artist who is taking a romantic interest in Yelena. He sees no higher purpose in life than beautiful artistic expression. Vageen openly professes his love to Yelena numerous times, and urges her to leave her loveless marriage. He believes that art is more important to the world than science.

FEEMA

Feema is a maid with her sights set firmly on working her way out of the servant class. Beautiful and mercenary, she has no shortage of attention from the men in the play but she will continue to negotiate until she brokers a deal that serves her best. Feema is adamant that wealth is the most important aspect in life, even if the pursuit of wealth requires sacrifice of her mind and soul.

Character Analysis (cont.)

NAZAR

Nazar is an example of someone who, in Russia at the time, was termed a 'Kulak': a meritocratic social climber who has made money by buying up cheap land and employing cheap labourers to work it. Nazar may well once have worked for the Protasov family, but now, as well as being a pawnbroker, he is their landlord.

MISHA

Nazar's son, Misha, has been brought up to believe he can take what he wants from the world. And at the moment he wants nothing more than Feema. He believes the way to get her is to buy her.

AVDOTYA

Avdotya is a simple peasant who suffers physical abuse at the hands of her husband Yegor. Yelena goes to Avdotya's side when she is ill at the end of the play.

YEGOR

Yegor is the local blacksmith employed by Protasov. His physical size, ignorance and devil-worship make him a danger to be near, particularly to his long-suffering wife.

This Character Analysis has been adapted with permission from:

Blakely, J. (2013). *The National Theatre Learning Children of the Sun Background Pack*. United Kingdom: The National Theatre.



Hamish Michael, Justine Clark, Jacqueline McKenzie, Toby Truslove and Chris Ryan in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014.

Image: Brett Boardman. ©

CONTEXT OF THE PLAY

KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE

Gorky wrote *Children of the Sun* in 1905 as a warning to the Russian people about paying attention to the world around them and the change ahead of them as Russia continued down the path to revolution as outlined in the below timeline.

SOCIALISM

Socialism is a political system where the means of production and distribution are regulated by the community as a whole. Socialism is encapsulated in the term “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” This means that nothing in society is owned by an individual and everyone is sustained by public expense. Each person will contribute to society according to their capacity.

TSAR

The King of Russia.

IMPERIAL RUSSIA

Russia ruled by a monarchy and the royal family.

SERGEI WITTE

The economic reformist who led Russia to being a modern industrial nation.

PROLETARIAT

The exploited industrial workers who would lead the revolution and defeat the ruling Russian bourgeoisie.

SERFS

The name given to peasants/labourers who were tied to working on their landlord's estate. Serfdom was part of the feudal system where nobility held land from the crown and the peasants were obliged to live on the land, serving their landlord.

CHOLERA

Cholera is the infection of the small intestine caused by contamination of food and water by poor sanitation. Prevention of the disease can be achieved through the treatment of sewerage.

Context of the play (cont.)

TIMELINE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1861-1917

1861

THE EMANCIPATION OF THE SERFS

Serfs were granted freedom from their landlords by Tsar Alexander II after the Crimean War and an increasing number of violent peasant revolts. The emancipation of the serfs triggered the breaking down of the class structure in Russia.

1894-1905

REIGN OF TSAR NICHOLAS II

Russia was solely presided over by the royal family and no parliament system was in place, although the Tsar did employ several Ministers. Russia was experiencing slow economic development and was no longer a main player on the world stage, after losing the Crimean War and the Russo-Japanese War. Patriotism was at an all time low and the people were increasingly losing faith in the Tsar and Imperial Russia.

1890'S – 1901

FORMATION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTIES

The economic growth saw an increased interest in political issues by the people of Russia and a greater opposition to the Tsar. As such, several revolutionary parties were formed in the hope of overthrowing the Tsar.

Social Revolutionaries – industrial workers who used terrorism as a revolutionary tactic but would later be integral in the February revolution of 1917.

Social Democrats – peasantry who later divided into two parties, the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The Bolsheviks would lead the October 1917 revolution.

SERGEI WITTE'S ECONOMIC REFORMS

Count Sergei Witte, a minister of the Tsar, along with Peter Stolypin sought to modernise Russia. During the 1890's there was a major growth in Russian industry mainly through the exportation of coal and oil by private companies. Witte was inspired by the results of the industrial revolution in Europe and set about developing an effective railway system which would power the Russian economy.

1905

(THE YEAR *CHILDREN OF THE SUN* WAS WRITTEN)

By 1905 Russia had lost two wars, the prisons were overflowing, extreme censorship meant there was no freedom of religious or political expression and there was famine in the countryside. The government had implemented heavy taxes and showed incompetence towards handling a country in crisis.

On Sunday 22 January 1905 a peaceful march of workers gathered outside the Winter Palace. The marchers were there to present the Tsar with a petition demanding relief from their poverty. Palace guards fired upon the marchers killing 200 people and injuring hundreds more. This massacre caused widespread disorder in Russia and public

buildings and country estates were attacked and seized by peasants in a bid to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

In October of 1905 the Tsar created a 'Duma'. The Duma was a parliament with law making powers and made a commitment to introduce civil rights for the Russian people such as freedom of speech, religion and unions. Until this point protesting and the right to assembly were forbidden. The October manifesto mainly satisfied the people of Russia for the time being.

1914-1918

World War One

1917

FEBRUARY REVOLUTION AND ABDICATION OF THE TSAR

On 18 February a full scale strike took place in a steel factory in Petrograd. Workers were later joined by growing numbers of supporters and by 25 February there was a city wide strike and widespread disorder. The Duma eventually dissolved as the Tsar refused to provide concessions for the people of Russia.

Two government bodies were formed after the Duma parliament system ended. These two bodies were: the Provisional Government who represented revolutionary elements of the old Duma and the Soviet Government who represented the striking workers. Together they created the de facto govern-

Context of the play (cont.)

TIMELINE OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION 1861-1917

ment of Russia who aimed to wipe out the old government and elect a new assembly via vote.

The Tsar tried to return to Petrograd, however his train was intercepted by mutinous troops and the Tsar was advised that the situation in Petrograd was dire. He was instructed by his advisors to abdicate the throne. On March 3 the provisional new government declared to the world that revolution had taken place in Russia.

OCTOBER 1917

Just seven months later another revolution would take place. This revolution, which would bring Lenin to power, was the result of public dissatisfaction in a weak Provisional Government, unable to meet the demands of the people. Lenin and his Bolshevik party were a radical left wing group calling for a Socialist government. The Bolsheviks gradually gained the support of the unsatisfied and impatient soldiers who demanded peace, workers who demanded bread and peasants who demanded land. This created the battle cry for the October Revolution: 'Peace! Bread! Land!'



Hamish Michael, Yure Covich, James Bell and Justine Clark in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Brett Boardman. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS

Children of the Sun is a play largely concerned with impending change. Gorky uses the socio-political context of the play to examine the opportunities and challenges that emerge from periods of technological, social and political revolution.



Justine Clark, Jacqueline McKenzie and Toby Truslove in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Brett Boardman. ©

CHILDREN OF THE SUN

'Children of the Sun' is a term that refers to the privileged intellectual elite of Russia which is personified by characters such as Pavel, Yelena, Liza and Vageen.

'Children of the Sun' is also a metaphor for the main characters in the play working towards a brighter future. Protasov sees chemistry and scientific investigation as tools to bring about social change. Feema is also a 'child of the sun' as she desires a better life for herself other than that of a maid. 'Children of the Sun' is a term that continues to be used in popular culture today in songs, television shows and artwork. The phrase is commonly used when describing youth striving towards a better future or a greater purpose in life, where the 'sun' represents the desired outcome.

POISON

The leaking poison is the major turning point in the play and causes the final moments of disorder. Poison is a symbol of Pavel's lack of perspective and responsibility. The leaking poison makes the townspeople sick, and when compounded with the superstition about doctors, causes the town to descend into violence and chaos. The poison is also a symbol incorporated by Gorky as a caution to Russian people about how quickly toxic ideas, fallacies or events can contaminate society and cause widespread anarchy if not fixed or addressed. This was particularly relevant to audiences in 1905 who were watching the play as revolution was taking hold of their country. Liza understands the danger of the leaking poison and how events in society can create a toxic world.

Themes and Ideas (cont.)

RESPONSIBILITY

Pavel's absorption in his own experiments not only leads him to be unaware of the world around him, but also prevents him from taking responsibility for his family and his actions. Pavel is told multiple times that the copper lining to the tank has cracked and is leaking poison making people sick. He dismisses this claim repeating that the tank is lined with copper and continues with his experiments.

Pavel's single-mindedness means other members of the Protosov household are called to account. Yelena is called upon to pay the rent when Nazar visits and is delegated to speak to Yegor about beating his wife. Pavel is the ultimate 'kidult' who is incapable of responsibility. This is seen in the final moment of the play when he calls hopelessly for Nanny as the townspeople descend on the house.

CROSSING OF CLASS, FINANCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL LINES

Maxim Gorky wrote *Children of the Sun* while imprisoned in St. Petersburg in 1905 during a period of strong political upheaval against the Russian Empire. This unrest was one of many events that lead to the revolution of 1917 which resulted in the collapse of the Russian Empire into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the world's first communist country.

Although *Children of the Sun* was written 12 years prior to 1917, Gorky was aware of the change ahead through his own allegiance to Socialism. It was this sense of impending change and the need for people to be aware of it that inspired him to write *Children of the Sun*. The Protosov family in the play are part of the upper class Russian bourgeoisie who tended to by lower class servants. There are moments in the play where class boundaries were crossed such as when Yelena shows no hesitation in tending to Yegor the blacksmith's sick wife and child.

Feema is eager to move out of a life as a servant and sees wealth as her ticket to a better life. She believes in her own potential to elevate herself above her current station: "I can't help it if you see yourself as just a bit of furniture. I don't. I'm not." (pg. 19) Intellectual boundaries are also crossed in the play as the characters explore the importance of art versus science, the role of chemistry and their goals in life (their 'sun').



Valerie Bader in rehearsal for STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Grant Sparkes-Carroll.©

Themes and Ideas (cont.)

INDUSTRIALISATION

Russia was one of the last countries to undergo industrialisation. Gorky has incorporated the idea of industrialisation into the text to show Russian society's ability to evolve and keep evolving as it was doing in the 1860's when the play was set. This concept is encapsulated in Pavel's chemical pursuit. Conversely, Gorky also offers a subtle warning about progressing too far, too quickly. This is portrayed in the lines "There are cars everywhere these days. I saw three on the weekend. You won't be able to breathe. Or Walk. No one'll walk." (pg. 80) and "That same Yegor who lost a wife and a child to the Iron Road. Crushed like bugs." (pg. 46)

ART VS. SCIENCE

Gorky explores the age old tension between art and science through the oppositional views of his progressive thinking characters. Protasov believes that chemistry "will find the secret of life itself" (pg. 15) and will lead the world towards a prosperous future. He describes a "man of Science" being at the prow of the ship that heads towards the sun - the "source of life." (pg. 49)

Vageen, believes that art is more important than science and that art should exist for its own sake. In contrast, Yelena believes that the purpose of art should be to communicate and impart knowledge onto others in order to progress

into the future. Yelena's commitment to her inattentive husband endures as long as it does because she sees the potential of their relationship through their shared view about how art and science can enrich the future. In the end as the danger outside grows and Liza becomes more hostile, Yelena loses faith in Pavel's science experiments. In a time where leadership and solutions were needed, Pavel offered nothing. This is seen in Yelena's line "Have you found the source of life? Have you found the final piece of the puzzle? You've sacrificed all of us, for what? Pavel? For your 'Sense'. For some great sudden insight? Where is it? This sense you've made?" (pg. 117)

THE COSMOS

In conjunction with the sun, there are strong references to the universe which is spoken about by Pavel to encourage Liza to think about the bigger picture in life and not be caught up in "our petty lives and tiny struggles." (pg. 56) Pavel states that the moon does not stop orbiting and the sun does not stop shining just because of life's small problems. This way of thinking proves quite ironic considering Pavel's preoccupation with his experiments and his isolation from the outside world.

Gorky also uses the character of Pavel to question what should guide our thoughts and actions. At the time, most Russians would have been guided by religion, however Pavel believes "If there must be a divine force? Let it be the sun.It is the sun that burns in our veins and sustains our precarious balance." (pg. 57)

TRUTH

Pavel's experiments are ultimately in pursuit of truth – proving chemical theories. He is passionate about finding the truth and believes it is in the eyes of the innocent. Pavel believes that truth is held back by games of emotion, fear, anger, passion and joy. This perspective may explain his fixation on his experiments and his distant relationship with his wife.

The characters believe that superstition suppresses the truth in Russia society. The lines "superstition and alcohol." "Welcome to Russia." (pg. 47) hint at elements that may hold back society from finding the truth and progressing into the future.

When the townspeople become unwell and begin to die, they become superstitious of doctors and believe that the doctors are deliberately making people unwell by experimenting on them to generate more business. At the end of the play the townspeople, desperate to lay blame, begin to attack doctors. This superstition detracts from the truth that it is the poison leaking from the tank and in turn fuels further chaos in the town.

Themes and Ideas (cont.)

A BROKEN WORLD

The world of the play is a broken world. Russian society at the time the play was written was broken, as the outdated class system and monarchy were beginning to disintegrate. Similarly, the characters and their relationships throughout the play are destroyed beyond repair. Pavel and Yelena's marriage is broken, while Liza's fearful rants similarly portray her mental state as broken. However, Liza's outbursts prefigure the future, in particular the outbreak of illness and the violence at the end of the play.

The broken world of *Children of the Sun* is portrayed in the line by Boris "Something here is broken, and awkward and living with it, you finally see that if this wonderful place could be so rotten, then all our lives are compromised, contingent, and the effort? For so little, real result." (pg.42)

LOVE AND DESPAIR

A hallmark of many Russian Dramas is character pursuits of love that lead them into a state of desperation, often causing them to take dire actions. This is no different in Gorky's *Children of the Sun*. All of the characters are in pursuit of being loved, however for various reasons this love is unattainable. Yelena longs for the love and attention of Pavel, however his pre-occupation with his experiments prevents this and leads Yelena to leave him. "You made a beggar of me; forcing me to wait for the scraps." (pg. 96)

Boris professes his love for Liza numerous times. When Liza refuses his marriage proposal, in a state of despair, he hangs himself.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- What do you believe is more important in the world? Art or science?
- If you were to consider yourselves as "Children of the Sun" what are you striving for? What is your 'sun'?
- When in history has superstition caused widespread fear or chaos?
- What belief systems guide your actions, opinions and beliefs? Whether it be religion, the universe or even your school motto?
- If you have read other Russian Dramas, what other relationships are characterised by love and despair?
- How is the leaking poison the turning point in the play? Why?

THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

CHARACTER

The CHARACTERS in *Children of the Sun* are comprised of six privileged Russian bourgeoisie and six Russian workers and maids. The Dramatic Action is driven by the characters big ideas about society, truth and science and their complicated love triangles. Together they have no uniting thoughts to champion the change that needs to occur in both their own lives and the town.

Gorky has carefully constructed the CHARACTERS in *Children of the Sun* to each represent different aspects of pre-revolutionary Russian society.

Pavel – Protasov’s passion for scientific change represents progression for Russian society. His complex CHARACTER also represents the search for truth and the importance of working towards a goal – ‘the sun’ which is similar to revolutionaries of the time striving towards a better society.

Vageen – Vageem represents members of Russian society who are selfish and only concerned with their own interests, thoughts and ideas which hold back progression.

Liza - Liza represents anguish about the state of the world and the fear felt by Russians surrounding the rapid change their society is going through.

Yelena – Yelena embodies the revolutionary spirit and passion for action. She is willing to challenge her privileged status for the greater good of Russia and its people.

Nanny – Nanny represents the ‘old’ traditional Russia and is subtly resistant to change. Her most poignant line is when she urges the Yelena and Melaniya to “Come in. Out of the sun. Come on.” (pg. 51)

Feema – Feema represents the breaking down of the Russian class structure.

Nazar – Nazar being a kulak represents one of the changes that have already occurred in Russian society.

Melaniya – Melaniya is a reminder of both determination and love. She is willing to do anything to gain the love of Protasov.

Boris – Boris is the only formally educated character with a day job in the play and therefore represents the importance of intellect in revolutionary society.

TAKE YOUR CUE:

- What are some specific lines from the play that symbolise each CHARACTER?
- The CHARACTERS have distinctive high and low STATUS. How is STATUS communicated? Consider LANGUAGE, voice, MOVEMENT and costume.
- Which CHARACTER’s ideas do you feel most strongly aligned to? What happened in the play to make you feel this way? Consider LANGUAGE, TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS and MOMENT.

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

DRAMATIC TENSION

TENSION is the force that drives all drama and moves the Dramatic Action forward. TENSION strengthens AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT as it motivates the audience to continue watching while influencing them to continue to question the ideas in the play.

The TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS in *Children of the Sun* is derived from the clash of ideas between the CHARACTERS. The different characters beliefs about what is important in the world creates TENSION between them. The TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS becomes more complex as the threat of the world outside the Protasov home begins to grow and inside the home becomes more dysfunctional. This TENSION remains unresolved at the end of the play as the rioting masses descend on the home. The audience is left to consider which ideas would champion the change needed.

TAKE YOUR CUE:

- Pavel's experiment creates TENSION OF TASK throughout the play. At what point does this TENSION meet its climax? Is this TENSION resolved?
- The TENSION OF TASK with Pavel's experiment symbolises a greater task in the world of the play. What is this task?
- What is the TENSION OF MYSTERY present throughout the play? Is this resolved?
- What TENSION is caused by the leaking poison? Is this TENSION resolved?

The TENSION OF RELATIONSHIPS is also created through the love stories in the play. Boris' love for the vehemently apprehensive Liza and the love triangle between Pavel, Yelena and Vageen. This TENSION created through love triangles, collides with the TENSION of ideas between the characters and creates the action of the play.



Image: Grant Sparkes-Carroll. ©

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

TIME

HISTORICAL TIME PERIOD

Children of the Sun was written in 1905 before the 1917 revolution that brought Socialism into power. The socio-political conditions of the TIME inform the action of the play. Russia was a 'broken' society with an outdated class structure, economy and industry. Together these aspects created great unrest amongst the Russian people (particularly the 88% peasant population) creating a country crying out for a revolution. *Children of the Sun* is set in 1860 where the Protasov household is stuck in a chasm between the old ways of Imperial Russia and embracing societal change. It is this chasm that creates the clash of ideas and the Dramatic Action of the play. Gorky has chosen to set the play 45 years prior to the time it was written as a warning to the Russian people about what can happen if you do not open your eyes to the world around you. Gorky also uses the play to foreshadow the change in Russia.

Take a moment to read the context section of this *On Cue* for a greater understanding of how TIME influenced Gorky's writing of the play.

TENSION BETWEEN THE NOW AND THE TIME OF THE PLAY

In his essay *Grappling with Gorky*, Andrew Upton reveals that when adapting a classic, "It is important to find the angle of the story that resonates with the day and age. The time and the place in which the story will be told and how it will be seen [...] It is not for an adaptation to seek to replace the original or improve on it, it is to bring it alive for now." Perhaps programming *Children of the Sun* for 2014 is important given the countries of the world that are enduring political unrest as Russia did such as, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Ukraine. Knowing that Russia did find direction and eventually took shape as a nation, *Children of the Sun* warns modern day audiences about the repetition of history.

The parallel between now and 1860s Russia can also be drawn from science and technology. Pavel is working towards a scientific breakthrough, while Russia undergoes industrialization. In 2014, science and technology advances cause society to be constantly undergoing unfathomable change. Throughout the play the prospect of change influences the CHARACTER's ideas and objectives.

TAKE YOUR CUE:

- Discuss MOMENTS in history that *Children of the Sun* could relate to.
- The final line of Upton's essay, *Grappling with Gorky*, is "The horror is behind us, on the horizon." Discuss what this statement means in relation to history and the future.
- *Children of the Sun* is set in the 1860s. How is this TIME reflected through DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES?

The Elements of Drama (cont.)

LANGUAGE

Gorky wrote *Children of the Sun* in 1905 and this adaptation was written by Andrew Upton in 2013. Just over 100 years apart, Upton has retained the original story while adapting the LANGUAGE to include modern words, phrases and in some instances swearing! Such phrases include “What are you/crapping on about?”(pg.30), “The town’s going bonkers.” (pg. 68) and references to galoshes and a dating agency.

TAKE YOUR CUE

- What purpose does the inclusion of modern LANGUAGE serve?
- How do modern words and phrases effect AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT?
- What other modern words and phrases were incorporated by Upton?

DRAMATIC MEANING

DRAMATIC MEANING is created through the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA that are interrelated and interdependent. DRAMATIC MEANING is what is created between the performers, the world of the play, the DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES and the audience. DRAMATIC MEANING is always open to interpretation and there is never one set meaning in a production.

Consider the following DRAMATIC MEANINGS in *Children of the Sun*:

- Find the sun and work towards it.
- Do not become so consumed with your own pursuits that you lose sight of the world around you.
- Do not be consumed with your own endeavors at the expense of others.
- Take responsibility for your actions.
- What is more important in life? Art or Science? Or can they co-exist?
- Change in society is inevitable and with that comes change in tradition, people and ideas.
- When the world becomes broken, change must occur to fix it. “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

TAKE YOUR CUE:

- What other DRAMATIC MEANING could be derived from the production?
- How did the ELEMENTS OF DRAMA and DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES create the DRAMATIC MEANING about the world of the play as a broken place?



CHECK OUT THE POSTER ON OUR WEBSITE FOR AN IN DEPTH ANALYSIS OF SYMBOL IN THE PLAY!

STYLE

GORKY- THE FOUNDING FATHER OF SOCIALIST REALISM

Until his death, Gorky was considered the defining voice of Russian writers and artists. Socialist Realism became a definitive STYLE in the year of Gorky's death in 1934 when the Soviet Union of Writers was formed. The Socialist Realism STYLE was influenced by revolutionary sentiment in Gorky's plays such as *Children of the Sun*. As the Socialist Realism STYLE was not coined until 29 years after *Children of the Sun* was written, the STYLE of the play is Naturalism with Socialist Realism tones.

Gorky's *Children of the Sun* had a definite political tone. As discussed in the Elements of Drama section, each CHARACTER represents a notion of pre-revolutionary Russia, while the key themes and ideas of the production portray a society ripe for change. In particular, the Dramatic Action includes the crossing of class, financial and intellectual boundaries that hints at the potential for societal transformation.

All art created after 1934 in Russia was defined as Socialist Realism. Under Stalin's rule it was declared that culture should perform a social and political role by reflecting Socialist values. Artists were deemed 'engineers of human souls.' A set of strict guidelines were enforced for all writers to conform to when creating work.

All art was to be:

Proletarian – Relevant to workers

Typical – Reflect the everyday lives of the audience in terms of events, jobs, behaviours

Realistic – Represent reality in elements such as character, set and costume

Partisan – Support of communist beliefs



Helen Thomson and Toby Truslove in rehearsals for STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Grant Sparkes-Carroll. ©



CHECK OUT OUR SKETCHBOOK FOR *CHILDREN OF THE SUN* COSTUME DESIGNS!

Style (cont.)

NATURALISM

The STYLE of *Children of the Sun* is Naturalism. Naturalism represents life in all its exactness. Scenery expresses the inner spirit of the play and the actual world of the play. CHARACTERS in a Naturalistic play are psychologically motivated and talk and move in a realistic way. The 'fourth wall' makes the audience feel as though they are 'flies on the wall' watching the lives of the CHARACTERS.

Towards the end of the play as parts of the set are taken down, the STYLE moves from Naturalism to Symbolism. The dismantling of the set symbolises how certain CHARACTERS in the play continue in their daily lives as the world around them falls apart.

COMEDY

The Comedy in *Children of the Sun* is described by Andrew Upton as coming "...from their floundering against, or inside, the massive tide of social change that is pre-revolutionary Russia." He also notes that the class distinction between the characters creates MOMENTS of Comedy in their struggle to understand each other, their traditions and indulgences.

An example of this is when Feema strikes a deal with Melaniya to spy on Yelena and Vageen's relationship. When Feema decides that she wants to be more than a maid and leave, she seeks advice from Melaniya who she sees as her ally, but is flatly refused.

Comedy is also created through sarcasm, clever analogies, dry wit and the characters mockery of each other. Comic timing in the delivery of certain lines also creates comedy. This is seen in particular between Melaniya and her brother Boris. Boris is referring to Melaniya's desperation for Pavel to love her when he says "How long did the poor Atomic have to wait?", Melaniya replies "Sorry? What?/I didn't....Boris?" (pg. 26) and "Boris doesn't like anyone though. Because he is a failure and it's made him bitter." Boris then replies to Melaniya saying "And success has made you so sweet." (pg. 26)

TRAGEDY

Children of the Sun contains several tragic elements. There is tragedy in Pavel's inability to see the damage his experiments have caused to the townspeople and the changing world around him. He is so focused on the minutiae of his experiments that he fails to recognize his increasing isolation and the growing distance between him and his wife.

Part of the play's tragedy is also in the failed potential of the characters. All the members of the Protosov household are invested in Pavel's brilliance and his ability to change the world. However, his brilliance causes his negligence that leads to the poisoning of the townspeople. In the end, Pavel creates tragedy, rather than a wondrous future. The characters misplaced hope in Pavel is tragic and leaves them at the end of the play in a state of chaos and confusion.

Style (cont.)

SET AND COSTUME

The Naturalistic STYLE of the production means both the set and costumes are of the time period. The set is a representation of a Russian home in the mid 1800's while the costumes are period costume. Naturalism has been chosen for set and costumes as it creates the realistic world of the play that is firmly grounded in a historical context. Naturalism enables the audience to be immersed in the Dramatic Action, the journey of the CHARACTERS and grapple with themes and ideas present in the play.

When the set revolves smaller rooms of the Protosov home are revealed. These rooms are disconnected from the main set of the dining room and expose the back of the stage. This is a deliberate choice to disconnect the audience from the play and bring them out of 1800s provincial Russia and back into 2014 at the Opera House. This aligns with Upton and Williams' idea to keep one foot firmly in the past and one firmly in the present, enabling audiences to draw parallels between the world of the play and 21st century life.

LIGHTING

The lighting design by Damien Cooper is at times dimly lit creating a foreboding ATMOSPHERE. The softly lit stage also evokes the feeling of the play being set in the past. When the stage revolves and characters walk into the different rooms of the house, their shadows are cast up onto the stage, creating a visually ominous and eerie MOOD.

SOUND

Max Lyandvert's sound design of high pitched, fast paced, classical music assists in the creation of both a historical context and in creating a flurry of tension, change and disorder.



Justine Clarke and Julia Ohannessian in STC's *Children of the Sun*, 2014. Image: Brett Boardman. ©

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The following learning experiences are to be undertaken by students in groups of two or groups of five. Groups of two are to use the scene between Yelena and Vágeen. Groups of five are to use the scene involving Pavel, Yelena, Liza, Boris and Vágeen. Prior to starting the activities students should read the Character Analysis and the Themes and Ideas section of this On Cue to help inform their decisions.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE ONE

FOCUS:

Inner truth of the character

PRACTICE LINK:

Performing.

RESOURCES:

Pen and paper, *Children of the Sun* excerpt (supplied), white-board

TAKE YOUR CUE: Objective and Super-Objective TIME: 20 minutes

1.Explain to students the history and theory behind the Stanislavski system of rehearsal. The following main points can be written on the board, however more detail can be found in the books listed in the bibliography of this On Cue.

Constantin Stanislavski created the Moscow Arts Theatre in 1898 which had the motto “there are no small parts, just small actors.”

His system of acting was the foundation for Realism and Naturalism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The system was centred around studying ‘inner truth’ and the psychology of the character and the background of the character by analyzing the text using theories such as Objective and Super Objective, Magic If, Given Circumstances and Emotional Memory. He believed that this theory would lead to more realistic and truthful acting and that characterisation was drawn from the text. .

2.Explain the concept of Objective and Super Objective. These definitions can be written on the board.

An Objective is what a character wants to achieve in a moment in the play or a particular scene. The Super-Objective is what a character wants to achieve in the play as a whole.

A character’s Objective and Super-Objective influences what they say (their lines), how they say it (their voice) and their movement (including use of stage space, gestures and body language.)

3.Students are to decide which character they are going to play. In their groups they are to read their chosen scenes out loud and discuss the personality of the different characters. They are then to decide on their Objective and Super-Objective.

4.Students are to choose one line from the text that really encapsulates their character’s objective in that scene and justify their answer.

5.After 15 minutes go around the class and ask students what they believe the Objective and Super-Objective of the character is and their chosen line.

Learning Experiences (cont.)

TAKE YOUR CUE: Given Circumstances

TIME: 20 minutes

1.Explain to students the theory of Given Circumstances.

This can be written on the board.

The Given Circumstances are the information that the playwright gives the actor through the text. The Given Circumstances can relate to the character in the play as a whole and in a given scene or moment. Given Circumstance questions could include: What is the location and time period of the play? What is the character's relationship with other characters? What are the characters beliefs? What does the character look like physically? What is the character's occupation?

2.Ask students in their books to answer the above Given Circumstances for their chosen character in the play.

3.After 10 minutes, group students together in their character groups (all Yelena's together etc.) and ask students to share their answers.

4.Character groups can then share their answers with the class and discuss their reasons for their answers based on the text.

TAKE YOUR CUE: Magic If

TIME: 20 minutes

1.Explain to students the theory behind Magic If. This can be written on the board.

The Magic If asks actors to think "If I were the character in this situation, what would I do?" By answering this question the actors are able to react to the unreal life on the stage in a realistic way. It is important to think about the "do" in the question – "what would I do?" What action is going to be created by the character?

2.Students are to write in their notebooks what they would do if they were their character in the situation in their scene.

3.Share with their fellow actors in the scene.



FOR MORE ACTIVITIES SURROUNDING
TEXT ANALYSIS CHECK OUT OUR MOTIVATION AND
BLOCKING WORKSHEET!

Learning Experiences (cont.)

LEARNING EXPERIENCE TWO

FOCUS:

Voice and Movement

PRACTICE LINK:

Performing

RESOURCES:

Pen and paper, *Children of the Sun* excerpt (supplied), whiteboard

TAKE YOUR CUE: Action is Reaction

TIME: 1 Hour

1. All movement on stage happens for a reason and is motivated by what the character wants to achieve in the scene (their Objective). If a character sits down – why do they do this? If a character holds the back of their neck – why do they do this? What do these actions say about the character – their thoughts and feelings in that moment?
2. Students are to divide up into their groups with their scenes from *Children of the Sun* and block their scenes. This includes movement in the space, their character's action (are they doing anything? Pouring a cup of tea etc.) and any gestures or body language that are used.
3. After 30 minutes students are to perform their scenes for the class.
4. After each group has performed their scene ask students what action was particularly effective for them in showing a truthful reaction of the character and why.

EXTENSION: STOP! THINK! Augusto Boal Rehearsal Technique

1. Ask students to perform their scenes again for the class.
2. This time, the audience can call out "Stop! Think!" followed by the actor's name (e.g. Stop! Think! Sarah) and that actor has to justify why they performed that particular movement, action, gesture or body language.

Learning Experiences (cont.)

TAKE YOUR CUE: Voice modulation

TIME: 1 hour

1. Like movement on stage, the voice of the actor also has a purpose behind it and is influenced by the character's Objective in the scene.

2. The elements of voice modulation including pace, tempo, pausing, volume, tone, emphasis, intonation and enunciation.

Definitions of each of these are below and can be written on the board.

Pace – How fast or slow the character speaks

Tempo – The rhythm of the character's speech

Pausing – A silence

Volume – The loudness or softness of speech

Tone – The character of a sound which is often influenced by emotion. Tone can be defined using adjectives. (e.g. a firm tone)

Emphasis – The stress placed on a word or phrase to give it importance

Intonation – The rise and fall of a voice (the pitch) when speaking

Enunciation – The clarity of the voice

3. Ask students to find a space in the room and annotate their character's lines using the above voice modulation. Remind students that their voice modulation is influenced by their character's objective and their given circumstances. Students will also need to consider the Magic If of the character in that situation which will influence their emotion in the scene portrayed through their voice.

4. Ask students to get back into their groups and practice their scenes.

5. Present to the class.

6. After each group has performed ask the students what voice modulation choices were particularly effective in portraying a character's objective and 'inner truth.'

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OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR *CHILDREN OF THE SUN*

- Pre-Show In-the-Know handout for fast facts and what to look for in the performance.
- Classroom poster and handout about symbols in *Children of the Sun*
- Worksheet - Analysing Motivation and Action in a scene
- Designer Sketchbook - A digital sketchbook featuring photos and sketches of the set and costume design

CHILDREN OF THE SUN SCRIPT EXCERPT

Two Characters. Page. 32 and 33.

Vageen: How's the homunculus? He's a pedant and worse. His treatment of you. What is it with these / experiments?

Yelena: I wish I'd never said anything.

Vageen: As an artist, if that's what you want to be. You should be free. The door is there. Walk.

Yelena: I will.

Vageen: When?

Yelena: I'm not doing anything until I know what he feels for me.

Vageen: He feels nothing.

Yelena: If our relationship has ended then so much the better that I know now and can move on. If, however, the love he feels for me is deeper. Then I will. Stay.

Vageen: You what?

Yelena: I can't leave him if he loves me. I can't be the one who breaks his heart.

Vageen: What are you scared of?

Yelena: I will not willfully destroy another life.

Vageen: And yours? Your life?

Yelena: Animals. Animals spend their lives worried about their own survival. A person can only distinguish themselves from animals by leading a life that makes the world a better place. Regardless.

Vageen: Always leave the bathroom cleaner than you found it? And other petty / bourgeois pomposities?

Yelena: And your world? Of impassioned self-serving? / What does -

Vageen: You have the soul of a slave locked inside your fabulous. That fabulous. You're fabulous - and you give yourself to this tinkering pedant who would happily reduce the definition of your fabulousness to a series of chemical interactions. What of Art? Of Culture? Of the very fabric of our humanity?

Yelena: Your fabric is too sheer for me. My sense of Art / demands I -

Vageen: Your sense of Art has only just begun. Your ignorance and confusion scare you. You are scared of the way Artists love.

Yelena: If Artists love passion for it's own sake, yes.

Vageen: Cold. So cold.

Yelena: I'm too honest for passion. I am too old, and so are you.

Gorky, M. (1905), adaptation by Upton, A. (2013) *Children of the Sun*. United Kingdom: Faber and Faber.

CHILDREN OF THE SUN SCRIPT EXCERPT

Five Characters. Page. 52 to 54.

Boris: But be careful. One of them is a cuckoo.

Yelena: A cuckoo? Is it this one?

Boris: It could be ... Let me see?

Yelena: Or / this one?

Boris: Oops.

Yelena: Boris.

Vageen: It's not that one.

Protasov: Don't let / Nanny see.

Liza: Yelena, / stop this waste. Pavel?

Vageen: I love the way the / yokes shimmer as they burst.

Yelena: It's just fun. Isn't it Pavel? Relaxing fun.

Protasov: It's a / bit sticky.

Boris: Look at this one.

Yelena: No that / one's. Oh.

Protasov: Liza, catch.

Liza: Pavel. People are starving. / This is food. Boris. This is disgraceful.

Boris: They're all everywhere.

Protasov: It's just fun. Liza.

Vageen: This is freedom. It means nothing except / what it means to us. Now.

Boris: What a mess. All gone.

Yelena: It's / just silly.

Protasov: Nanny!

Liza: Pavel. Yelena? All of you?

Protasov: We were just being silly. Mucking / around.

Liza: That's food. That is food. Look at the waste.

Protasov: She brought them for an experiment and I don't need them today.

Vageen: We were playing. Play is freedom.

Liza: Can't you see? The way you live? This freedom. Here? Is merely a clearing in a dark and dangerous wood. This precious clearing we inhabit, that allows for the odd flower, the odd laughter. But the wood that surrounds us,

is dark and putrid. Airless and rotten. The wild and the embittered are breaking out onto the streets, exterminating each other with delight. Soon their malice will rain down upon all of us. You read about / it everywhere. No where is safe. Nothing is working.

Protasov: Liza, you read too much. Really. Those are all. Don't ... It's all ... Sweet Liza I think your nerves have / made it difficult to ...

Liza: Shut up about my fucking nerves. It's just so you don't have to think / about what I know.

Protasov: Well, I don't know / I ...

Liza: No you don't. None of you can see that by just making your selves better and happier you have made the world worse.

Gorky, M. (1905), adaptation by Upton, A. (2013) *Children of the Sun*. United Kingdom: Faber and Faber.